

Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Press Conference on North Korea
Wednesday, February 13, 2002

I am pleased to join with the gentleman from New York (Mr. Gilman) and the Gentleman from California (Mr. Cox) to call upon the Bush Administration to cancel plans to transfer two light water reactors to North Korea.

In naming Iran, Iraq and North Korea as members of the "Axis of Evil," President Bush is being criticized for grouping together three nations that have far more differences than similarities when it comes to aiding Al Qaeda. But with that phrase the President has identified one essential truth: each of these three nations is aggressively pursuing the goal of obtaining weapons of mass destruction. Each has sought the technology to launch nuclear warheads at the United States or its allies. Each poses a risk for spreading nuclear weapons or the materials to make those weapons to terrorist groups hostile to the US. The success of any one of them would pose the greatest national security threat to America today. Every time new evidence emerges about the outlaw activities of these nations, the United States is quick to protest, and rightly so.

The President's State of the Union speech has now focused new attention on this problem. The President said in his State of the Union address that North Korea is part of an "axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." He noted that "North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens." And he pledged that "We will work closely with our coalition to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction."

Next week, the President is going to Asia. In connection with this trip, we believe that now is an opportune time for him to announce that he is reconsidering plans to move forward and provide the North Koreans with two light water reactors. We know right now that the Administration is considering whether or not to release additional funds to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which is responsible for constructing the two light water reactors in North Korea. Before this can be done, however U.S. law requires him to certify that North Korea is abiding by the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework and that it has no covert nuclear weapons program. We suspect that the facts do not support the President's making such a certification. There have been disturbing reports in the press, for example, suggesting that the North Koreans may have a covert underground nuclear weapons facility at Mt. Chun-Ma.

Last week, the Gentleman from California, the Gentleman from New York, and I sent a letter to the President calling on him to reconsider plans to transfer these two light water reactors to North Korea. We believe this program should be cancelled. We have urged the President not to follow the practice in previous years of waiving applicable certification requirements. We are highly skeptical that North Korea will ever allow the International Atomic Energy Agency full and immediate access to suspected nuclear facilities and other information in North Korea.

In the Congress, we have succeeded in attaching to the Price-Anderson reauthorization the Cox-Markey amendment, which would bar indemnification of any U.S. contractors who ship nuclear technologies to North Korea through the House back in December. And we have also succeeded in attaching the Gilman-Markey-Cox amendment to the Export Administration Act, which was reported out of the International Relations Committee last year and which may come to the floor this Spring. This provision mandates that any future nuclear cooperation agreement with North Korea require approval by both Houses of Congress before it can go into effect. Together, these measures reflect the strong bipartisan concern which exists about North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Now that President Bush has refocused the world's attention on the importance of keeping weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of unstable and hostile regimes, we must work with Russia, Europe and our allies in Asia to impose a multilateral and total ban on the export of nuclear technology. A good place to start is by canceling the transfer of nuclear technology to North Korea. At the same time, I believe that we should press Russia to bring an immediate halt to its nuclear deal with Iran. Simultaneously, we must demand that Iraq allow international inspectors full access to all of its suspected nuclear facilities. Our axiom must be, "No nuclear access for the Axis of Evil."